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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to explore whether Fishman and Roslow's concept of adjacent listening could be adapted to studying television viewing behavior and used as an indicator of audience interest and information-seeking behavior. A second hypothesis was that different types of news programs might be preferred by groups reporting primary reliance on either newspapers or television. A survey on public opinion and mass media use was conducted in the fall of 1982 by the Mass Communication Research Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. A sample of these survey respondents was recontacted and asked to maintain television viewing diaries. Response rate for the diary study was 52%, yielding 114 usable diaries. The 114 respondents consisted of 58 who ranked newspapers as their primary source of news and current events information and 39 who ranked television as their primary source. The remainder were split between radio, magazines, and interpersonal sources. Results showed that the group primarily reliant on newspapers tended to be older and better educated, have fewer television sets, watch less television, and watch news programs selectively rather than as a result of lead-out or inertia. (DF)

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MEDIA RELIANCE, TELEVISION NEWS AND VIEWER SELECTIVITY

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Media Reliance, Television News and Viewer Selectivity

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abstract

This study hypothesizes that Fishman and Roslow's notion of adjacent listening could be adapted to studying television viewing behavior and used as an indicator of audience interest and information-seeking behavior. We further hypothesized that different types of news programs might be preferred by groups reporting they primarily rely on either newspapers or television.

Results confirmed our hypotheses in general and these measures were also shown to be related to each other through factor analyses, and provided good discriminating power in differentiating between reliant subgroups.

Results were interpreted as indicating that the reliance grouping does provide groups similar in not only the amount of viewing done but also the general approach to viewing television news.

MEDIA RELIANCE, TELEVISION NEWS AND VIEWER SELECTIVITY

The increasing numbers of Americans who cite television rather than newspapers as the medium they most rely on for current events information has prompted scholars to examine what it means to be "reliant" on a medium (McDonald, 1983, McLeod & McDonald, 1985; O'Keefe, 1980; Reese & Miller, 1981).

Researchers have examined the rank ordering of media reliance and found that newspaper and television reliance are not mirror images of each other -- they have somewhat different antecedents (McLeod, Luetscher & McDonald, 1980). Compared to the newspaper reliant, those who say they rely on television are younger, less educated, have lower incomes, and are less interested in politics (McLeod & McDonald, 1985). Differences between those reliant on different media are not limited to traditional "social category" classifications, however. Uses of specific media content and attitudes toward the media appear to be better predictors of both newspaper and television rank orderings than are demographic factors or gratifications sought from the media (McLeod, Luetscher & McDonald, 1980).

More recently, interest in the reliance concept has shifted from a primary concern with use of reliance rank orderings to a focus on primary reliance as a more general indicator of an orientation toward the mass media. This notion suggests that people who describe themselves as primarily reliant on one news source over another reveal as much or more about their lifestyles and news interest as they do about their actual media behavior

(Faber, Reese & Steeves, in press; McDonald, 1983).

If individuals are grouped based on which medium they say they primarily rely on (television or newspapers, in most cases), these groups exhibit different attitudes toward the media and also differ in the various cognitive, affective and behavioral outcomes associated with media use (McLeod, Luetscher & McDonald, 1980).

Curiously, few differences have been shown in the actual media use behaviors of the reliant subgroups. Research has shown a tendency for people to actually use the relied-on medium slightly more than others, but overall time spent with the news media is roughly the same, regardless of which medium one reports relying most on (Faber, Reese & Steeves, in press).

Several analyses have suggested that the real utility of the reliance construct lies in its designation of qualitatively different subgroups marked by similar motivations and attitudes about the media. However, our understanding of why these differences exist and what implications they have is inadequate (McDonald, 1983; McLeod & McDonald, 1985). It has been suggested that, for many, saying they rely on television is a default option to actively following politics, with reliance a surrogate measure for how actively one pursues information (Reese, 1984).

Differences in viewer activity/passivity should be manifest in different television viewing behaviors. If one is a passive news follower, television is a painless source of information, requiring relatively little mental activity. Because reading is a more active information seeking behavior, passive information

seekers are less likely to use the print media. Those who are strong print media users, however, are also likely to use television for its news content, but in a more active fashion than customary for the passive, heavy entertainment viewer.

Most prior studies in this area have been restricted to a comparison of self-report measures of the frequency of viewing local and national news or entertainment broadcasts (Becker & Whitney, 1980; McLeod & McDonald, 1985; Reese & Miller, 1981). These investigations may not reveal some major differences in the way programs are viewed or in the types of news programs viewed. Because of the linear programming strategies of broadcast television, an individual may watch a show either for its specific appeal or because he or she is waiting for another program to come on.

McDonald (1983) found that reliant subgroups may be responding differently to the same questions about media use because of different orientations toward the content. Under these conditions, use of questions about the frequency of viewing certain types of programming may be a misleading indicator of interest or an altogether inappropriate measure of attention paid to that program.

An additional complication in this area is that the amount of news programs available to the public has multiplied in recent years, and the definition of news has begun to change (e.g., celebrity journalism, "news you can use," etc.). It may be that the passive news viewer expects a different kind of news program than does the active viewer. If so, self-report measures of news

viewing may be based on different types of programs for the two groups; the newspaper reliant referring to traditional network and local newscasts, the television reliant referring to nontraditional, "soft," or "feature" news programs. It is doubtful that the standard survey questions on news viewing frequency tap the kinds of news and information conveyed through these programs.

This study investigated these two areas of television news viewing, the active selection of television news content and the viewing of nontraditional television news programs, and their relationship to media reliance.

Fishman and Roslow's notion of "adjacent listening" (originally developed as an aid to understanding the radio audience) provided a method for examining the activity of the audience in selection of programs (1944). They suggested that behavior immediately before and immediately after a specific program can provide evidence of the selectivity the audience member has in choosing the program content. Selectivity reveals important information about the appeal the program has for the viewer. When viewers specifically tune in to watch a program, for example (by changing channels or turning on the set), they reveal something about their interest in the program.

Programs to which viewers specifically tune in should, in general, have more appeal to the viewer than programs viewed as a result of viewing inertia (the tendency to continue viewing the same channel). Even if the viewing frequency of these programs is the same for two groups, selectivity can provide a clue t

interest in the program.

We investigated nontraditional news programs because these programs may have an appeal structure different from traditional news programs, but may be classified as news by the individual (McDonald, 1983). Many of the recent nontraditional news programs focus on blends of entertainment and features, with occasional stories related to current events. Others have focused on in-depth reporting of an issue, providing more than just the traditional headline approach of broadcast news. Yet these divergent types of programs and more traditional newscasts can be described as news programs in the broadest sense, and these may provide a clue to differential orientations of audience members.

Both of these areas might be hypothesized as related indicators of activity/passivity in news viewing. Because television viewing is subject to scheduling conflict, viewing inertia and other audience flow and selectivity characteristics (McDonald, in press; Watt, 1979; Webster, 1985; Webster & Wakshlag, 1983), the viewing of content can be conceptualized as an indicator of a higher order factor related to the individual's use of the medium. For example, someone might view a network newscast because it is a lead-in to the prime-time access period, which is generally filled with syndicated programs such as reruns of situation comedies, game shows, and the feature news program PM Magazine. If one is interested in viewing any of these programs it may be easier to sit through news programs than it is to turn the set off and find another pastime until time for the

programs of real interest. On the other hand, a person who utilizes television news as information will probably not be as willing to sit through unrelated content as a method of killing time.

However, members of the audience do not directly determine the content of the programs they sit through, except through changing channels. The more passive exert less control over the content. It is in this way that the notions of viewer selectivity and the viewing of nontraditional news programs become intertwined. Because of scheduling constraints and other structural characteristics, we suggest that both selectivity of viewing and viewing of nontraditional news content are manifestations of the activity/passivity dimension.

The present study hypothesized:

H1: The newspaper reliant bring an active information-seeking behavior to their television news viewing. The television reliant are more passive in their information seeking. There should be greater selectivity in news viewing among the newspaper reliant than among the television reliant.

H2: The newspaper reliant seek traditional news content. The television reliant seek more entertainement-oriented news and current events information. The television reliant will watch more non-traditional news programs stressing entertainment aspects of current events.

H3: Because of scheduling and programming, viewing selectivity and the content of programs viewed is intertwined. Factors derived from a combination of the measures should discriminate between newspaper and television reliant individuals.

Method

Respondents and Grouping

A survey on public opinion and mass media use was conducted in the fall of 1982 by the Mass Communication Research Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. A sample of these survey respondents were recontacted and asked to maintain television viewing diaries (very similar to those used by national ratings services) in the evening from 6:00 to 10:30 (CST). Response rate for the diary study was 52%, yielding 114 usable diaries.

The 114 respondents consisted of 58 who ranked newspapers as their primary source of news and current events information and 39 who ranked television as their primary source. The remainder were split between radio, magazines and interpersonal sources. Analysis proceeded including those 97 who listed either newspapers or television as their primary sources. Those who ranked newspapers first were classified as newspaper reliant; those who ranked television first were classifed as television reliant.

Variables

Viewing of several programs was included in the study: the 6:00 network evening news programs, the 10:00 local news

programs, the newsmagazine shows 60 Minutes and 20/20, the feature news magazine PM Magazine and the PBS news program the MacNeil-Lehrer Report. Amount of viewing of each was measured through a simple count of the number of quarter hours spent viewing each of the news programs. All of these programs were broadcast five days per week for one half hour at the time of data collection, except for the two hour-long newsmagazine programs 20/20 and 60 Minutes. Viewing of the news magazine programs was summed to develop a more comparable scale. The number of quarter hours viewed in a week for the combined news magazine programs could range from 0 to 8; for all other programs the number of quarter hours ranged from 0 to 10.

In addition to simple amount of viewing, program selectivity was investigated by examining tune-in (changing channels in order to view a program) and tune-out (changing channels immediately after a news program). We also examined turn-on (turning on the set immediately before watching the news) and turn-off (turning off the set immediately after watching the news). In each, a simple count of the occurrences of the event was recorded over the week for all instances of traditional news programs (the 6:00 evening news and the 10:00 local news).

Additional measures were self-report variables related to age, education, income, the frequency of television viewing, and the number of sets per household. The first four were included because previous research has suggested the necessity of controlling for these factors to develop adequate understanding of the effects of our primary study variable, media reliance

(McLeod & McDonald, 1985; Reese & Miller, 1980).

Number of sets per household is included partly for descriptive purposes (it has not, to our knowledge, been included in related studies), and because we felt it was a neglected area of research related to the availability of programming within the home (cf., McDonald, in press; Webster & Wakshlag, 1983). For instance, it may be easier to be television reliant in a multi-set home, especially if an individual in the home tends to dominate program choice on the main set. Inclusion here does not suggest any directional link concerning reliance and the number of sets.

T-tests and discriminant analysis provide the major statistical methods for testing hypotheses.

Results

As found previously (McLeod, Luetscher & McDonald, 1980), significant differences were found in the age and educational levels of the reliant subgroups, with the newspaper reliant older and more educated than the television reliant (Table 1). Additionally, the television reliant said they watched more television per day and had more television sets in their homes than did the newspaper reliant.

The first hypothesis was that the newspaper reliant would be more selective than the tv reliant. Results presented in Table 1 provide some support for the hypothesis. The adaptations of the four selectivity measures revealed one significant difference between the groups. The newspaper reliant were more likely to have turned on the set prior to watching a newscast. For two of

the other three selectivity variables, the sample showed a greater tendency among the newspaper reliant to view selectively, but these differences were not significant.

Table 1 about here

Table 1 also provides some evidence for our second hypothesis, that there would be significant differences in the type of news programs viewed. The newspaper reliant were more likely to watch the late evening newscasts than were the television reliant. Conversely, the television reliant were more likely to watch PM Magazine than were the newspaper reliant. Other differences were not statistically significant.

The third hypothesis was that an analysis of the news viewing and selectivity measures should yield some interpretable factors related to both selectivity and content. A factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted on the content and selectivity variables, yielding four factors with eigenvalues above 1.0 (accounting for 76% of the variance in the indicators).

The first factor had high loadings on the network newscasts, PM Magazine, and switching the channel after the news, with additional (although slightly lower) loadings on viewing newsmagazines and turning the set off after viewing a newscast (Table 2). This first factor appears to reflect a curious mix of the use of television news for information and in an accidental manner, as it loaded high on the network newscasts, but also loaded on the selectivity variables and the news feature programs

and newsmagazine shows. This factor was labeled Television News Flow.

Table 2 about here

The second factor demonstrates a strong loading for turning off the set after a news program (.87) and two lesser loadings -- switching channels after a news program (.45), and not watching PM Magazine (-.43). This second factor was labeled Entertainment Avoidance.

The third factor was interpreted as Local News Selectivity - loading high on watching a local newscast (.76) and turning on a set prior to a news program (.59). While it appears to be an indicator of selective viewing, the factor could also be an indicator of late-night viewing -- turning on the set at 10:00 leaves little choice but to watch the news, especially among noncable households.

The final factor is primarily a reflection of MacNeil-Lehrer viewing, a program which, at the time of the study, focused each program on a single event or issue and examined it in depth. The factor showed slight loading for the newsmagazine programs as well, and slight negative loadings for PM Magazine. This suggests that the factor reflects the notion of seeking extended treatment of issues, and was labeled Substantive News Seeking.

The factors taken together reflect some of the dimensions of audience activity/passivity and information seeking behavior. Further analysis centered on the relationships between these four

factors of activity/passivity in television news viewing, the background characteristics described above, and prediction of the media reliance groupings.

Because the third hypothesis was that factors derived from program selectivity and viewing should discriminate between reliant groupings, a multiple discriminant analysis was performed (Table 3). The canonical correlation (in the two group situation a measure identical to multiple correlation) for the discriminant analysis was .52, indicating that 27% of the variance in the reliance groupings was explainable by the independent variables. The group means (group centroids) indicate that the newspaper reliant group had higher values on the discriminating function (.48) than did the television reliant group (-.76). The standardized coefficients may then be interpreted readily with positive coefficients indicating a positive association with newspaper reliance and negative coefficients associated with television reliance.

Table 3 about here

As Table 3 indicates, more sets per household and greater television viewing frequency are associated with television reliance. Age, education, entertainment avoidance, local news selectivity and substantive news seeking are all associated with newspaper reliance. The discriminant function calculated with these variables classified 69 of the 92 cases correctly (75%), with nearly equal percentages correctly classified in both

groups.

Although the discriminant function coefficients are included in results, the total structure coefficients (the correlation between original variables and the discriminant function) tend to be better indicators of which variables are the major components of the function (Klecka, 1980). The total structure coefficients are reproduceed in Table 3 as well.

As evident from the table, the number of sets per household is a major component of the function, although there are substantial correlations for education, age, entertainment avoidance, local news selectivity and substantive news seeking.

Overall, then, the profile that emerges is one of the group primarily reliant on newspapers as being older, better educated, having fewer television sets, watching less television and watching news programs selectively rather than as a result of lead-out or inertia. The television reliant group can be seen as reflecting the opposite of these characteristics.

Discussion

The present study hypothesized that Fishman and Roslow's notion of "adjacent listening" could be adapted to studying television viewing behavior and used as an indicator of audience interest in specific programming and information seeking behavior. We further hypothesized that the television reliant may prefer a type of news program different from traditional news programs, and that "entertainment-based" news might be a major source for the television reliant. We reasoned that these two ideas were related and that factors based on both sets

of measures would serve as good discriminators between reliant subgroups.

Results replicated previous studies finding the newspaper reliant older and more educated. The present study also found the television reliant had more television sets in their homes and watched more television per day. Greater numbers of sets suggests that television viewing may be more convenient or more probable for these people. T-tests for differences in means for the two groups showed greater tendency for the newspaper reliant to turn on a set just before viewing news and to watch more local evening newscasts. The television reliant were more likely to view the news feature program PM Magazine.

The factor analysis of nine measures of content and selectivity confirmed our expectation of the relationships between the measures, indicating the role that viewing inertia (the tendency to continue viewing a station) and information seeking play in selection of different content in television news programs. Four factors were interpreted as Television News Flow, Entertainment Avoidance, Local News Selectivity, and Substantive News Seeking.

In a discriminant analysis, age and education were again shown to be important predictors of reliance. Additionallly, the number of sets per household and three of the four television viewing factors were significant predictors of reliance grouping.

The analysis generally supports all three hypotheses. Those primarily reliant on newspapers, in addition to being older and better educated, are higher on selectivity factors, indicting

that they are more likely to have consciously sought out the television news they view than are the television reliant. The newspaper reliant are also more likely to avoid entertainment programs airing just before or after the newscast.

The study provides more evidence on the complexity of issues in research on television viewing in general and television news in particular. Our factor analysis and discriminant analysis point to the interrelationship of program schedules, viewing selectivity and specific content viewing by the audience.

The results add support to McDonald's (1983) suggestion of the mingling of news and entertainment values for some respondents and the difficulties that may present in developing straightforward analyses of the television news audience, and suggest the frutfulness of non-traditional measurement techniques. Additionally, we find some support for Reese's (1984) idea that reliance may be a surrogate measure for activity in information seeking.

A third aspect of these results is that we find some evidence to support Levy's (1983) division of audience activity into qualitative and temporal components. We find support here for slectivity in what Levy describes as the pre-exposure and post-exposure phases of communication. As Levy notes, the former has been the subject of considerable work. The latter, selectivity in the post-exposure phase (e.g., after viewing), merits greater attention.

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Table 1

Mean Scores and Results of T-tests for Differences Between Reliance Groups

	Newspaper Reliant n=58		Television Reliant n=39	
Background:	$\bar{x}$	s.d.	$\bar{x}$	s.d.
Age ***	46.95	(15.16)	40.79	(13.15)
Years of Education ***	16.07	(2.73)	14.62	(2.73)
Television Viewing Frequency *	2.30	(1.28)	2.76	(1.37)
Number of Television Sets **	1.70	(.69)	2.27	(.90)
Content Viewed: (Quarter-Hours)				
Network Newscasts	3.88	(4.28)	4.15	(4.09)
Local Newscasts (10:00) **	4.22	(3.70)	3.08	(3.03)
MacNeil-Lehrer	.31	(1.11)	.13	(.66)
News Magazine Programs	1.43	(2.15)	1.67	(1.98)
PM Magazine **	1.02	(2.60)	1.95	(2.73)
Viewer Selectivity:				
Turn on Set Prior to News	.67*	(1.06)	.26	(.60)
Turn Off Set After News	1.09	(1.06)	.79	(1.20)
Switch Channel to Watch News	.02	(.13)	.05	(.22)
Switch Channel After News	1.53	(1.94)	1.28	(1.61)

*p<.05
**p<.01
***p<.001

Table 2

Rotated Factor Matrix

Network Newscasts	.90	.22	.03	.14
Local Newscasts (10:00)	.20	-.05	.76	-.03.
MacNeil-Lehrer	.16	-.02	-.04	.65
News Magazines	.53	-.10	.15	.29
PM Magazine	.61	-.43	.24	-.30
Turn On Set Prior to News	-.03	.09	.59	-.01
Turn Off Set After News	.46	.87	-.13	-.04
Switch Channel to Watch News	-.01	.19	.05	-.01
Switch Channel After News	.80	.45	-.01	.23
Eigenvalue	2.95	1.66	1.21	1.03
Percent of Variance	32.82	18.39	13.51	11.47

Table 3

Function Coefficients for Discriminant Analysis Predicting Reliance

	Discriminant Function Coefficients	Total Structure Coefficients
Number of TV Sets	-.51**	-.62
Age	-.52**	-.37
Education	.42**	.48
TV Viewing Frequency	-.32*	-.18
Television News Flow	-.10	-.17
Entertainment Avoidance	.44**	.32
Local News Selectivity	.26*	.29
Substantive News Seeking	.39**	.35
Canonical Correlation	.52**	

Note. Discriminant function coefficients are standardized. Group means (centroids) were .48 for the newspaper reliant and -.76 for the television reliant.

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001